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ABSTRACT

This handbook is intended as a guide to the American teacher in helping Vietnamese students make the cultural and academic transition to the American classroom. Part one of the handbook suggests approaches to specific problems arising from cultural and linguistic differences, including forms of address, coeducation, work habits, contact with parents, and language of instruction. Part two provides more general information about Vietnamese culture, its values and concepts, and the attitudes of the Vietnamese toward education and school. Part three contains a glossary of vocabulary items found on Vietnamese high school diplomas and certificates. It is provided to assist in the identification of items on these documents. Part four contains a selective bibliography of generally available materials related to Vietnamese culture and language. (Author/AM)

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A Handbook for Teachers of Vietnamese Students:

Hints for Dealing with Cultural Differences in Schools

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Center for Applied Linguistics
Vietnamese Refugee Education Series: 3

A Handbook for Teachers of Vietnamese Students:

Hints for Dealing with Cultural Differences in Schools

by
Duong Thanh Binh

in collaboration with
Anne-Marie Diller
Kenton Sutherland

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PREFACE

The Center for Applied Linguistics, a non-profit Ford Foundation-supported national center for the application of linguistic research, has responded to the urgent need created by the immigration of thousands of Vietnamese to this country by developing the present material for use by the refugees and others working with them. It is our hope that this material will contribute to bridging the language and cultural barrier, and help the refugees to take their place as new members of American society.

Rudolph C. Troike
Director

A. Hood Roberts
Deputy Director

Vietnamese Clearinghouse Project Staff

Kenton Sutherland, Coordinator
Duong Thanh Binh
Trang Kim Dung
C. Dale Lyons
Nguyen Hy Quang

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INTRODUCTION

One or more Vietnamese students who speak little or no English will be entering American classrooms now or in the near future. As teachers, it will be your responsibility to help these students make the cultural and academic transition as easily as possible. This handbook is intended to provide the kinds of information which will better help accomplish that task. It is intended to promote an awareness of and emphathy with Vietnamese cultural values so that as these students enter the educational system, you will be able to facilitate their cognitive and affective growth.

The first part of the handbook suggests approaches to specific problems, dealing mainly with the relationship between teacher and student, and with Vietnamese study habits.

The second part provides more general information about Vietnamese culture, its values and concepts, and the attitudes of the Vietnamese toward education and school. It will help you to understand something of the students' background and how the Vietnamese value system compares and contrasts with the American.

The third part provides a selective bibliography of materials related to Vietnamese culture and language. These materials were chosen for their appropriateness, and their general availability.

This handbook does not treat the language problem, but other materials available from the Center for Applied Linguistics do. Most of the Vietnamese refugee children who have arrived in the U.S. have, if anything, only a very rudimentary knowledge of English, especially in the age group seven through fourteen. During the first months of school they will often feel helpless in trying to communicate. However, children are linguistically flexible and tend to pick up a new language fairly easily when they are permanently in contact with a new linguistic environment. The best way for you to accelerate this process will be to give them a little more attention than normal by providing the opportunity for individualized practice on key terms and expressions which are important to understanding lesson content. Here are some suggestions which may help.

First, you will be dealing mainly with three categories of students:

Category A: students who can speak and understand some oral English and who read with some accuracy. Such students' knowledge of written English, in other words, will normally be better than their ability to speak and understand.

Category B: students who speak haltingly and understand a

limited number of utterances in English. They may read slightly better than their speech would indicate.

Category C: students who do not speak, understand, read, or write any English.

There are at least six basic means for communicating with these students.

1. Non-verbal communication, such as gestures and body language, pointing out objects, mimicry, use of pictures and realia. This type of communication will be most useful for students in Category C, especially at the primary school level, but should not be discounted for the other categories of students.

2. Verbal communication will clearly be used for all categories of students, but its degree of sophistication will depend mainly on the students' previous knowledge of English. Slower speech, careful articulation, use of basic vocabulary and of simple, short grammatical structures, repetition, rephrasing, and avoidance of colloquial expressions or slang terms will be required for Categories C and B. Category A students will have to be taught the meaning of many idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms--do not assume that even Category A students will understand everything you say even though they say they do. Do not expect students (and this is valid also for students in Category A, at least at the beginning) to understand complex sentences with more than two clauses, such as: "The assignment you'll have to work on today will count as part of the contract which is due on Friday." Divide that type of sentence into three or four short sentences, each with a subject and a predicate, e.g.: "Now you need to work on your (X) assignment. This is part of the assignment for Friday. Turn today's work in on Friday."

Note: Turn in is an idiomatic expression, known as a "two-word verb." There are hundreds of these idioms in English. You must teach them to your Vietnamese students, since the sum of the two parts may not register, even though the basic verb (turn, for example) is recognized.

3. Written English: Because of the foreign language teaching methods which were generally used in Vietnamese schools, most Vietnamese students who already have some knowledge of English will understand written English much better than spoken English. It is therefore suggested that the teacher make extensive use of writing, especially when giving instructions concerning specific tasks to be carried out by the student. In other words, Vietnamese students are going to rely heavily on written material, books, pictures, notes, diagrams and blackboard explanations.

4. Use of another language. In some instances the occasional use of another foreign language such as French can be helpful. In Vietnam, students study a foreign language from what corresponds to grade 6 in the American system through grade 12. The only two languages which can be selected are French or English.

If a student in the age group of 12 and 15 has not taken English as a foreign language, he must have taken French.

5. Use of the Buddy System: For students trying to cope not only with a different linguistic medium for learning, but also with a totally new culture and a new social environment, having a friend he or she can turn to for guidance and emotional support may be the most important thing in the world. Pair your Vietnamese student with another student who is interested and willing to be helpful. Find out in the first week of school what the language situation is with both your Vietnamese and your American students and try to pair French speakers up, even if the American's French is rudimentary. The latter might receive extra credit in French for helping the Vietnamese student with his or her class work and could be of invaluable help in breaking down the language and cultural barrier.

6. The Vietnamese language: Above all, recognize that the Vietnamese student is one who has been a fully functioning individual in his or her own school and society, and who is not in any sense intellectually or emotionally handicapped. Although learning English must be a first priority, in many cases it may be possible to hire Vietnamese-speaking teachers and/or tutors to keep students up in the content subjects. In any case, fully developed Vietnamese-English bilingual-bicultural programs will undoubtedly flourish in school districts with large concentrations of Vietnamese students. The Center for Applied Linguistics is currently identifying materials in Vietnamese suitable for bilingual-bicultural instruction, in addition to the materials identified for teaching English as a second language to Vietnamese.

PART 1: Brief Hints for Dealing with Cultural Differences in Classroom Situations: Suggested Approaches for Teachers

Since Vietnamese students are accustomed to having their teachers decide everything for them, including telling them what they should do in class, they may naturally expect their American teachers to do likewise. To be on one's own, to be allowed to take certain initiative in one's studies, however exciting this may be, may also be confusing and even threatening to someone who has not been trained to enjoy such freedom. To assist the Vietnamese students to make a smooth transition from their old school system to a completely new one, it is advisable that their new teachers initially assume an authoritative role to guide the students and to acquaint them with the new classroom procedures until they feel more at home with their new environment. To be able to provide such guidance successfully will require a great measure of patience with the refugee students, plus a knowledge of their background, an understanding and awareness of their emotional and academic problems as well as a keen insight into, and appreciation of, their linguistic difficulties.

The following suggestions may assist the teacher in helping the new immigrant adjust to the conditions of American society. Clearly, suggestions should be considered only as basic, working generalizations. Of equal importance may be the individual student's personality and the variances in his or her educational background, age, maturity, social status, and family situation. Stereotyping of the individual on the basis of group differences should be carefully avoided; also to be avoided is the fallacy that children from different cultures are basically alike.

The sensitive teacher will need to be aware not only of the generalizations offered in this handbook but also of how each student adjusts and adapts to the American culture and to the American classroom. The teacher's goal is to insure that the classroom project of the moment is meaningful and worthwhile to every student. When Vietnamese students do not understand everything that is taught or said in class, the teacher should not assume that these experiences have been educationally meaningless and therefore worthless. Each experience is a stepping-stone in the learning process, and in the early stages steps must be small and often repeated. First impressions are frequently the most lasting, and the initial educational experiences refugee students

encounter may be the most important in their new life here. Similarly, the teacher may find this to be one of the most valid, worthwhile, and personally rewarding experiences of his or her professional career. The education of these students is a challenge to be faced with dedication and perseverance. The Center for Applied Linguistics hopes that these suggestions will be of value in helping these new Vietnamese Americans to become part of our society and to make their own unique contribution to our culturally pluralistic way of life.

The following are some problems you may encounter along with suggested approaches for dealing with them.

1.1. Forms of Address: Ask the students to address the teacher either as Mr. Smith, Mrs. Smith, or Miss Smith.

Call the student by his or her given name. Example: Nguyen Van Kien. Kien is the given name. Nguyen is the family name. Students will need to learn that the English way of writing names is the reverse of their own.

1.2. Courtesy to Teachers and to Students: Provide examples of polite formulas used daily in a classroom situation, e.g. "Good morning," "Hello," "Hi," "Thank you," "I'm sorry." You might ask the students how to say some of these polite terms in Vietnamese and try to remember a few of them to use with your Vietnamese students.

1.3. Shyness: Make the students feel at ease with a firm but friendly attitude.

Select one or two classmates (of the same sex) to befriend a student and to help him or her adjust to the new school environment.

Encourage the students to express their ideas in class. Ask the students to contribute cross-cultural ideas: how would something be done differently in Vietnam? How is something different in Vietnam? How is it the same?

Encourage the students to ask questions without feeling disrespectful to the teacher, or a nuisance to the class.

Do not press students to speak in public until they develop more self-confidence, especially in their use of English. Every effort should be made to avoid embarrassing them in public.

1.4. Co-education: Remember that the sexes are separated in Asian society, and, at least in the first few weeks of school, do not assign the Vietnamese team work with members of the opposite sex.

1.5. Working Habits: Help the students acquire new working habits by assisting them to:

a. Make good use of free class time. Again, the buddy

system can be useful here; the students will learn to copy their peer models.

b. Participate actively in class discussions and group projects. Be sure to elicit specific answers from Vietnamese students who may be too shy to volunteer--or who are unused to volunteering--answers.

c. Prepare their assignments in a form appropriate to different subjects. Written instructions as to requirements, format, etc. will be invaluable to the Vietnamese student.

d. Get acquainted with the ways Americans make use of the signs and symbols in arithmetic and in the numerical system. Don't overlook the monetary system, the calendar, the measuring system, time schedules, etc.

e. Locate sources of information besides the textbooks used in class, i.e. the school and local libraries, the newspaper and other periodicals, businesses and industries, private and governmental agencies.

f. Put to good use the preface, introduction, table of contents, and indexes in a book to find relevant information.

g. Get used to reading extensively as opposed to intensively.

h. Share the responsibilities in the maintenance of class materials and equipment.

i. Realize that asking for assistance from a classmate during class period is a fairly common practice, and that moving around in class, changing seats, talking to other classmates during class period might be permissible in some situations.

1.6. Assignments: When giving an assignment, be very specific about the time limit, the length of the assignment, its form, and the reading materials used.

Make sure the student understands that he should hand in the assignment without being reminded.

1.7. Utilization of School Facilities: Provide guidance in locating and making use of the school library, cafeteria, language lab, playground, lockers, and so on. The buddy system will be invaluable here.

1.8. Change of Classroom for Different Subjects: Make sure the student gets to the proper classroom without getting lost in a corridor. In Vietnam only the teachers move from class to class, and students remain in the same classroom. Be sure that an American student is assigned to guide a Vietnamese student to the next classroom for the first few days.

1.9. Instruction in Safety Measures: Make certain the student understands signs and symbols for exit, fire, danger, no trespassing, poison, and so on, used on the school premises.

Make sure that a buddy is assigned during fire drills or emergency alert drills.

1.10 Counseling:

Academic: Explain the elective and required subject system in the program of studies, and the extracurricular activities offered at the school.

Emotional: Encourage the student to seek help from the counselor whenever emotional problems arise. Teachers should not hesitate to consult the school psychologist if there are signs of serious psychological disturbance.

1.11. Grading System: Explain how the grading system works for different subjects, or for different types of assignments. Explain the meaning and values of letter grades, numerical grades, extra credit, contracts, self-grading.

1.12. Physical Education: Draw the student's attention to the fact that physical education is an important part of education, that many kinds of sports are offered, and that participation is expected.

Do not be surprised if the Vietnamese student shows reluctance in accepting some lockerroom practices. Gently explain that separated groups of boys or girls wash together in common shower facilities, and their appearing naked in front of one another during showers is a completely acceptable practice. It may take some time for the student to accept this practice, as it is shocking and unheard of in Vietnam. Vietnamese students who do not wish to shower in front of others should not be required to do so.

1.13. Contact with Parents: Do not wait for the parents of students to contact you if there are problems. On the contrary, be prepared to take the initiative in calling them for assistance and cooperation.

1.14. Language of Instruction: Make sure to enunciate clearly and slowly in talking to the student as he or she is not accustomed to the rapid idiomatic flow of native speakers of English. Try to avoid the use of slang, difficult idiomatic expressions, and abstract vocabulary terms. Use simple and short sentences in talking to the Vietnamese student, especially with the one who still has a poor knowledge of English. Use common words of high frequency, e.g. "Give me your papers now." instead of "Deliver your assignments to my desk upon completion."

PART 2: Detailed Background Information about the Vietnamese Educational System Including Cultural Conflicts Relevant to the School Environment

2.1. Forms of Address:

In the spirit of considering men and women living in society as members of a large family, the forms of address used in Vietnam are in terms of relationship, rank, and age among the members of a family--the so-called personal pronouns in Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese student's attitude toward teachers has always been one of great respect. Traditionally, the teacher was considered as the spiritual father (both morally and academically) who guided his student to the right path in life. The terms thay (father) and co (aunt, mother), which are used by the Vietnamese students at all levels to address their teachers, have been in use in Vietnam for many centuries. The common form of address would be:

THUA THAY or THUA CO

Thua is a polite form used before a personal pronoun when addressing or talking to someone superior to oneself in family/social rank. Notice that no family or given names are used.

The teacher, on the other hand, addresses the student using one of the following forms:

- con (child) — grade school
- em (younger sibling)
- anh (elder brother)
- chi (elder sister) — high school/university
- given name with or without anh/chi preceding it

A typical Vietnamese name has from 2 to 4 words/syllables. For example:

1	2	3
Nguyen	Van	Kien
(family)	(middle)	(given)

In the above natural order, Nguyen, the family name, comes first;

Van, the middle name, comes second; and Kien, the given name, comes last. Due to respect for the person addressed and for his ancestors, the family name (1) is not used. The name commonly used is the given name (3)--Kien in the above example--which is equivalent to "Mr. Smith" when one addresses Mr. Frank Smith in the United States. A Vietnamese would be addressed as Mr. Kien. In other words, the use of a family name in the U.S. is equivalent to the use of a given name in Vietnam. However, in a conversation, a Vietnamese rarely uses names to address a person, since this is considered impolite in Vietnam. Use of actual names is permissible only if he is on intimate terms with the speaker or when he wants to make sure that the person he addresses is Mr. Kien and not Mr. Canh.

The usual form of address in Vietnamese is the use of an appropriate personal pronoun preceded by the polite form thua, with no mention of family or given names. There is no similar device in English, unless perhaps English-speakers wish to say something like "honored sister" or "my distinguished teacher." The only possible everyday English comparison would be:

Dr. Father Sister Reverend Mr. Mrs. Miss Ms.	plus family name

Remember, the Vietnamese do not use family or given names in their daily life; they use a polite term plus a personal pronoun.

2.2. Courtesy to Teachers, Classmates of Both Sexes

In elementary and secondary schools in Vietnam, students have been taught to stand up when the teacher enters the class and sit down when the teacher gives permission to do so orally or by a wave of hand. This courtesy is also observed when a guest visits the class. At the university, however, this practice is not generally carried out.

Greetings between Vietnamese are usually a handshake between two males, or a joining of the person's own hands and a slight inclination of the head between two men, two women, or a man and a woman. For the young Vietnamese, a smile and a slight inclination of the head is enough.

On a more formal level, the greeting formula would be as follows:

1	2	3
CHAO	personal pronoun	A

Chao is a general greeting word used before a personal pronoun or a title of the person one addresses. A is a polite word at the end of a sentence.

The above formula can be used at the beginning or at the end of a meeting. In general, chao is deleted, and only (2) and (3) are used. So, a student would greet his teacher as follows:

"Thay a." (male teacher) OR "Co a." (female teacher)

The student never uses the teacher's name in Vietnam. There are no equivalent polite formulas for "good morning," "good afternoon," or "good bye" in Vietnamese, but the above formula is comparable to the American forms of greeting.

Inside a Vietnamese classroom, the courtesy observed is silence, to allow the teacher to speak without interruption and classmates to study without interference. Polite forms such as "Thank you," "Sorry," "Excuse me," "I beg your pardon," and so on are also used, but with great care, for the user might be thought insincere if he used them in profusion.

2.3. Education

Since the time Vietnam became independent at the end of World War II, its educational system has undergone tremendous changes. From being restricted to the education of a few (less than 1% of the population), it came to involve almost the total population. Expansion of school facilities and teacher training centers, development of programs of studies to fit the needs of the country, translation of French and English textbooks into Vietnamese, replacement of French by Vietnamese as the language of instruction in classes at all levels, development of adult literacy programs, and so on, took place. Despite all the difficulties caused by the long years of war, accomplishments in the field of education were truly impressive.

Owing to the deep influence of Chinese culture, Vietnam has always reserved for educated or "learned" people an honored place in society. Education has proved to be a great social leveling force in Vietnam for many centuries. There never was a landed or hereditary aristocracy in Vietnam, but there has always been an aristocracy of learning where the poorest boy from the most humble family in a village could become a high official in the Imperial Court. Vietnamese parents have been known to spare no sacrifices to give their children some kind of education or training.

Although there was no compulsory education in Vietnam as in the United States, the Ministry of Education tried to give every

Vietnamese an opportunity to learn to read and write Vietnamese. Illiteracy, therefore, was kept at a minimum. The modern Vietnamese writing system uses a modified Roman alphabet and is phonetic in nature. Public schools at the primary level were opened to every child of schoolage. At the secondary school level, however, an entrance examination limited the acceptances to those students bright enough to pass the examination. Hence, there was a rapid expansion of private schools for not all students could get into a public high school. In the past few years, the same thing happened at the university level, and many private universities opened to meet the needs of the ever-growing university student population.

Despite great achievements the educational system in Vietnam was not perfect. Some of its weaknesses were its heavily academically-oriented program, its inflexible nature, and its narrowness in terms of programs which did not take those individuals into account who did not fit into the existing educational molds.

2.4. Curriculum

With the exception of the university, which was academically autonomous, primary and secondary education in Vietnam was directly under the control of the Ministry of Education. The curricula of grade schools and high schools, the subjects taught, their contents, the required units for each subject, the textbooks used, and teaching strategies were all planned by the Ministry.

Up to the fourth year of high school, the programs of studies were uniform throughout the country, except for the choice of learning English or French as the first foreign language. At the senior high school level, three majors in the following fields were offered: Humanities; Mathematics; and Sciences. The technical high schools had a program of vocational training which was slightly different from the above academic programs.

High school diplomas were granted by the Department of Secondary Education of the Ministry of Education after students had successfully passed two national examinations: Baccalaureate Part I at the end of their junior year, and Baccalaureate Part II at the end of their senior year. These examinations were given only twice a year, at the beginning and end of each summer. Any student who failed had to repeat his class and take the examination again and again until he passed.

The Ministry of Education in Vietnam chose English and French as the two foreign languages to be taught. Upon entering high school at the age of 11 or 12, the Vietnamese student had to take either French or English as his first foreign language. For instance, if he selected English as his first foreign language, he would study English for seven years in high school. In his fifth year of high school, he would then take French as his second foreign language to be studied the last three years in high school.

Although the official syllabus published by the Ministry of Education suggested that the Audio-Lingual Approach be used in the teaching of foreign languages, the actual teaching and learning of these languages, and the language tests given in the national examinations were slanted toward the Grammar-Translation method and reading comprehension rather than toward equal development of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As a result, Vietnamese students learned to read and write French and English better than they learned to speak and understand either of these two languages.

In addition, the textbooks used in Vietnam to teach French and English, at least in the case of English, did not teach the students a functional, practical kind of English; as a result, Vietnamese students may know the rules of English grammar, but they will probably not know how to phrase simple but necessary questions, or how to give appropriate responses.

2.5. Teachers

Most of the primary school teachers in Vietnamese public schools were trained at Teachers Colleges run by the Ministry of Education. Most of the teachers in public secondary schools received their training from the Faculty of Pedagogy at one of the three national universities in Saigon, Hue, or Can Tho. While in school, these future teachers were given scholarships by the government and upon graduation, they were given assignments in various public schools across the country. Thus, they automatically became civil servants who could be punished or fired by the Ministry of Education for undesirable conduct. On the other hand, as civil servants, they could never resign from their posts.

Other teachers worked in the public schools on yearly contracts with the Ministry of Education. They were hired to meet the acute teacher shortage caused by the rapid increase in the student population and after five years, they could apply to become regular teachers if all the requirements of the Ministry of Education were met.

Teachers in private schools required permission from the Ministry of Education to teach, but they did not have to possess all the requirements of those in public schools. In recent years, because of the shortage of teachers graduated from training centers, private schools increased in number, and teachers in public schools were allowed to do extra teaching in private schools. This practice somewhat leveled the quality of teaching in both public and private schools.

Since public school teachers were civil servants who could not be easily dismissed, they had more authority to deal with their students, and did not have to bear the pressures of the Board of Education or the P.T.A., provided they adhered to the regulations of the Ministry of Education. Many of these teachers

later assumed administrative duties as school inspectors, school principals, or other positions at the Ministry of Education.

Although the teaching profession was no longer held in as high esteem as formerly, many Vietnamese still found the satisfaction and fulfillment in it that they could not find in other professions.

2.6. Students

The student population in Vietnam came from families in all walks of life--children of the poorest and of the wealthiest. Depending on the financial means of the parents, the children either attended a poor village public school or a well-equipped private school in the city. The quality of teaching, of course, varied from school to school. But whatever school they attended, they still followed the same program of studies, as outlined by the Ministry of Education.

The majority of Vietnamese are deeply attached to their families. Feelings of family honor, duty, and responsibility are very strong, even in the very young. With such a background, many of the students in Vietnam could not be called "full-time" students as the term is used in the United States. Many of them had to work to support themselves or help support their families, especially in the country, and many of them had to help their parents do the housework and look after their brothers and sisters after class while their parents worked. The student population in Vietnam did not include only those of schoolage, but also included adults who wanted to complete or further their education while holding a job.

Public schools were free in Vietnam, even at the university level where the students had to pay only a token fee. In the past, only students in public schools needed fear disciplinary actions leading to expulsion. But in the past decade, as the student population grew larger and larger, admission into private schools became just as difficult as admission into public schools. Once a student was expelled from a school, it was very difficult for him to be accepted into another. As a result, students were careful in their responses to the teacher and generally remained silent rather than disagree.

The school drop-out rate was high, especially after the primary level and, although the reasons vary, the main reason was usually financial. The inflexible and limited program of studies was probably another.

Vietnamese youngsters who had manual skills and abilities but little aptitude in abstract learning would find themselves at a disadvantage in a school setting where the programs were heavily academically oriented. Since they could not fit into the existing educational system, they often left school to search for training more appropriate to their abilities. In Vietnam, however, more often than not, these students would not have a very promising

future since, rightly or wrongly, diplomas and titles were highly valued.

2.7. Co-education

Classes having both boys and girls existed in Vietnam from kindergarten to the university level. Traditionally, however, mixing of the sexes was avoided as much as possible. In mixed classes, the girls would always have seats in the front rows, never sharing the same bench with the boys in the same class. No teacher would assign a boy and a girl to be a team in any class project. Friendships did exist, of course, but on a formal and reserved level. Romances sometimes bloomed, but, in general, the girls considered the boys in their class to be too immature or too young for them.

Although many customs and traditions were abandoned due to Western contact and the pressure of the war, courtship and marriage still occurred very much within the old framework, with the knowledge and consent of the parents. Frequent visits of a young man to a girl's house could mean only one thing: he had serious intentions. Going out in groups was permissible, but casual dating was not very common in Vietnam.

2.8. Classroom Set-up

In Vietnam, the teacher usually stood or sat at an elevated desk at the front of the classroom. Occasionally, the teacher would take a stroll to check on the students sitting in the back of the room. Desks and benches for from two to five students were put in straight and permanently fixed rows along the length of the room facing the teacher's desk.

Each student had a specific seat which was marked on a seating map. His or her seat could be changed only by request or by the decision of the teacher. Usually, the front rows were occupied by short-sighted students, by girls in a mixed class, or by students who were relatively studious and less noisy than those in the back rows.

Students had to remain quiet in their seats during class and could only leave their seats by raising their right hand or on order of the teacher. There was a five-minute break between the first and second and between the third and fourth class periods to allow a change of teachers, and a longer 20-minute break after the second class period. During this time, the students were allowed to go to the school yard. The number of students in a classroom varied from 40 to 65 in the public schools, and from 60 to 100 in the private schools. As there were shortages of school facilities, students were usually divided into two shifts--a morning shift from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. or 12:30 p.m. for those in senior high school, and an afternoon shift from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for those in junior high school. Evening classes were also

held in most of the school buildings in the cities from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. for adult students or any students who could not attend day school. At the primary school level classes were divided into three shifts: 7:00 a.m. - 10:20 a.m., 10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., and 1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Between class periods when there were changes of subjects, the teachers moved from one classroom to another, but the students remained in their own classroom for the entire day and, in fact, for the entire school year.

2.9. Working Habits

Rote learning was used by the majority of Vietnamese students to learn their lessons. This practice was probably popular because the lessons had to be learned and recited without change. Rote learning, though not necessarily bad, can be harmful by discouraging the student from seeking information through extensive reading of books and magazines. By making him dependent on teachers as the only source of information and knowledge, the student became handicapped in developing a strong sense of critical thinking and judgment. It also may have made the student lazy and irresponsible, as the teacher had to read the materials first and give the student what he or she could assimilate.

The dictation of lessons in class also took up a great deal of class time. As a result, there was no free class time.

Oral exercises were initiated by the teacher who started the questioning by calling on various students to give answers or by allowing volunteers to do so.

After the lesson was dictated and explained, the students were allowed to ask questions concerning anything they had not understood. Rarely, however, did the Vietnamese students do so.

All class activities were initiated by the teacher. The usual procedure was to give the same assignment to the whole class to avoid complaints. Competition was very keen among individuals. Team projects were rare and seldom encouraged. The teacher was always the final authority in any discussion held in class. The Vietnamese student, in other words, will respect and expect to have an authoritarian teacher, and will be confused, puzzled, and perhaps even dismayed by a non-authoritarian one.

The students, furthermore, will not be accustomed to using library facilities or to looking for books and searching for information on their own; they will be used to relying heavily on their teachers. They will also be accustomed to short, limited reading materials rather than long and extensive ones. It is therefore advisable for teachers to introduce the Vietnamese students gradually to the practice of extensive reading, to searching for information related to the lesson concerned, and to being responsible for their own studies. At least during the first few weeks of schooling, there should be a restriction on the students' class

activities, and a gradual relaxation of control when they have become accustomed to the new school procedures. As mentioned earlier, the Vietnamese students are visually-oriented, used to seeing and to learning their lessons in written form.

A great deal of encouragement and guidance in assisting them to develop oral communication skills with their teachers and classmates inside and outside of the classroom will also be necessary in order to help them succeed in their studies. Teachers should deliberately plan activities which require verbal interchange with individual students or perhaps small groups of students before Vietnamese students are asked to speak to large groups or to the whole class. Such a careful pacing of the Vietnamese students' verbal involvement--moving from individual, to small group, to larger groups--will establish a period of linguistic and interpersonal confidence. Asking a Vietnamese student to speak too soon to an entire group may inhibit his or her oral development and embarrass the student.

Remember: (1) Gradual introduction of individual responsibility for instruction; (2) Restricted activities for the first few weeks of schooling; and (3) Oral communication skills building by limiting initially the number of individuals the student must communicate with at one time.

2.10. Shyness

Shyness in a Vietnamese might more accurately be termed as a reserved attitude toward strangers or toward a person one does not know well. It is also a polite attitude used by Vietnamese to show respect to their elders or superiors. A warm friendly, and easy-going attitude soon makes the Vietnamese respond favorably.

The Vietnamese people have been brought up to respect and accept the opinions of their elders, or at least not to disagree openly. In a social situation, it is very important to maintain harmony between speakers or to save the face of someone whose opinion might turn out to be wrong. Disagreement would be put in a subtle form of alternative suggestions, or the matter in question would be mentioned later.

The Vietnamese have been brought up to accept orders or directions from elders or superiors, rather than to take the initiative. It is therefore not surprising that people from different cultural backgrounds have often thought that the Vietnamese are passive. Vietnamese are also known for showing off, but to do so in front of one's superiors or elders is not only impolite but in bad taste. According to Vietnamese custom, one should remain modest and humble, showing the extent of knowledge or skills only when asked. In Vietnam there is the motto of saying less than what one actually knows, often an admirable characteristic. Modesty and humility for Vietnamese are important social graces, and deeply ingrained into their identity.

In answer to praise the Vietnamese have been taught to refuse the praise by saying that they did not deserve it. For example, in a situation where a Vietnamese lady is being praised for her beauty, instead of accepting the compliment from her friend gracefully and naturally--as would be common in the United States--she would probably say something to the effect that she was not pretty, but that her friend might have gotten that impression from her clothes. However, if her friend praises her dress, she might say that it was only an old dress--which is equivalent to saying that her dress does not deserve to be praised. This behavior seems normal to other Vietnamese because it is an accepted custom, since the Vietnamese do not want to be considered immodest.

Again, when a Vietnamese is thanked for something, instead of saying "Don't mention it," or "It's nothing really" the Vietnamese will just smile and keep quiet. The latter behavior is seen most frequently in students being praised by their teachers, in children being praised by their parents or relatives, and in subordinates being praised by their superiors.

These last two characteristics of shyness and modesty could be misunderstood by people from other cultures who might think that the Vietnamese are insolent or impolite. The Vietnamese's behavior stems from the fact that they have been taught not to be demonstrative in public, especially not to express personal emotions which might be considered immodest or boastful.

The Vietnamese students are not actually shy in class, but they do not want to call attention to themselves. They are afraid, of course, to lose face if they make mistakes, and they do not want to appear as "showoffs" when they know the answer. They seldom volunteer to answer questions, and they are reluctant to ask questions of the teacher even when they do not understand. They will ask their classmates instead.

Teachers should not ask "Do you understand?" "Do you know what I mean?" if they want to make sure they have been understood. They will almost surely get a positive response even when the students have not understood a single thing. To avoid frustration, teachers should ask very specific questions, allowing students no possibility of evasive answers. The teacher should make it clear that question and answer periods are for instructional and review purposes and not for embarrassing students who do not know the answers. After all, every student makes mistakes and misunderstands from time to time.

2.11. The Vietnamese Smile: An Enigma

Almost anyone who has visited Vietnam or come in contact with the Vietnamese has noticed a rather puzzling habit--a perpetual and enigmatic smile in all circumstances, unhappy as well as happy.

The Vietnamese smile about almost everything and anything. In Vietnam they will smile when foreigners cannot pronounce their

names properly; they will smile as a friendly but silent gesture to welcome foreigners to their home; they will smile to please their superiors; they will smile to show their interest in what a speaker is telling them; they will smile to help their friend forget a mistake the latter made. On the other hand, the Vietnamese smile can be used as a polite screen to hide confusion, ignorance, fear, contrition, shyness, bitterness, disappointment, or anger.

Many foreign teachers in Vietnam have been irritated and frustrated when Vietnamese students smile in what appears to be the wrong time and place. They cannot understand how the students can smile when reprimanded, when not understanding the lessons being explained, and especially when they should have given an answer to the question instead of sitting still and smiling quietly. These teachers often thought the students were not only stupid and disobedient, but insolent as well. One thing they did not understand was that the students often smiled to show their teachers that they did not mind being reprimanded, or that they were indeed stupid for not being able to understand the lesson.

Smiling at all times and places is a common characteristic of all Vietnamese. There are, however, no guidelines to tell foreigners what meaning each smile represents in each situation. Remember that the Vietnamese smile may mean almost anything and that people from other cultures need not feel frustrated, irritated, or offended at not being able to guess its exact meaning.

2.12. Assignments

The Vietnamese Ministry of Education required the schools to give each student at least one grade for every school subject during every month of the academic year. This grade could be acquired either from a written assignment done in class or at home, or from an oral quiz given in class.

It was common, at the end of each lesson, to inform the students when a quiz on that lesson would be given, and what the form of that quiz would be--written or oral. Home assignments were given with clear instructions about their length and form, and the due date. Some teachers would relent if there were protests from the students about having too many assignments to do, and the time for completing the assignment might be lengthened or the form might be changed from written to oral.

Indeed, oral quizzing was a fairly common practice in school. Students were expected to know their lessons well, but each time only a small percentage of the class was tested.

In Vietnam, textbooks were fairly expensive and school library facilities were nonexistent. The teacher usually dictated the lesson to his students who copied the lessons in their notebooks. When the teacher gave an oral quiz, he would check the student's copybook to see whether it was kept clean, complete, in order, and whether the lessons were copied accurately. In this way, the

teacher was able to check his students' progress and spot lazy or weak ones.

2.13. Grading System

The academic year--two semesters--started in the middle of September and ended toward the last of May. Students were expected to take examinations at the end of each semester for all the subjects they had during the school year. Their moving-up to the next class level or staying at the same level the following year depended very much on the grades they received in these two end-of-semester examinations. Additional examinations were provided for those students who passed all subjects except one or two.

Grading was by numbers, going from zero or sub-zero to twenty. The average grade on this 20-point system was ten. This was also considered the passing grade. No teacher was expected to give his students a grade of twenty, even if their test papers were very good or excellent. The highest grades varied from 14 to 17, and the bad grades from 6 down. Grades above ten earned in one subject could be transferred to those other subjects in the final grades. The students in a class were ranked according to the total grades they received. Recently, objective tests were used for subjects such as civics and social studies in the National High School Examination. As the grades were expected to be high for these tests, no extra grades could be transferred from those tests to those of other subjects.

Grading by letters A, B, C, D, was used only in some private schools like those run by the Vietnamese-American Association, the London School, or the International School in Vietnam. In other words, letter grading is not generally familiar to Vietnamese students and should be explained in comparison to the 20-point system, approximately as follows:

No U.S. equivalent	20 (never given in Vietnam)
	19 (almost never given)
A+ range	18 (rarely given)
	17 (given infrequently and only to very exceptional students)
A range	16, 15, 14
B range	13, 12, 11
C range	10, 9, 8, 7
D range	6, 5, 4
F range	3, 2, 1, 0
F- range	Sub-zero

(These are rough approximations only.)

2.14. Signs and Symbols Used in Arithmetic and in the Numerical System

Vietnam adopted the French practice of using signs and symbols in arithmetic and the numerical system. Therefore, it is important to remember that when the Vietnamese student writes any number, he writes it the French way. The following are samples of the differences between the Vietnamese and the American practices:

	Vietnamese	American
One	1	1
Seven	7	7
Two thousand	2.000	2,000
Fifty cents	0,50	0.50

Division is not the same in the two countries. For example, 278 divided by 42:

Vietnamese

```
278   42
260   6,61
 080
  38
```

American

```
      6,61
42) 278.00
    252
    0080
      42
      38
```

Vietnam also used the decimal and metric system of the French in the measurement of length-volume-weight. In other words, the Vietnamese student solves problems in mathematics, physics, and chemistry in terms of meters and kilometers, liters, grams, and kilograms. not in terms of inches, feet, yards, pints, quarts, gallons, or pounds. Centigrade rather than Fahrenheit is used to measure temperature.

2.15. Physical Education

Although physical education was taught in Vietnamese schools, it was not taken as seriously as in the United States. Basic exercises to develop good physical stature and good breathing habits were given. A few sports were also offered, but only at boys' schools: soccer, basketball, table tennis, etc. Facilities reserved for sports did not exist in Vietnam. Lockerroom practices familiar to Americans will be unknown to Vietnamese; dressing and undressing in front of others, and group showering, as already mentioned, were not done, and therefore must be handled with

consideration for the Vietnamese students' basic modesty. It should be repeated that the Vietnamese should not be forced to take showers with others should they not wish to. Some bending of "Required showering after P.E." rules may be necessary.

2.16. Sex Education

Sex education was nonexistent in the primary and secondary schools in Vietnam, except for a very few lessons on menstruation given to girls at puberty as part of home economics courses. No charts or pictures of the reproductive organs were ever shown. Courses in human anatomy and physiology, botany, and zoology, barely touched on the subject of sex. Neither teachers nor students would bring up such a taboo topic in class.

At the university level where specialization started, sex organs and functions would, of course, be study topics in schools of medicine, nursing, sciences, etc. But even so, English or French was used as the language of instruction, or if Vietnamese was used, sophisticated Sino-Vietnamese or Latin terms were employed, rather than common Vietnamese terms. Even in the examination of female patients, doctors were known to use round-about expressions to elicit information, since the patients rarely knew the medical terminology, and in deference to the patients' modesty.

Sex education rested with the parents, from father to son, and from mother to daughter. There are now books for prospective brides and grooms dealing with the problems of sex (sex organs, functions, intercourse, etc.), but, even so, only simplified sketches are provided, and the instructions given are very general in nature.

The reluctance on the part of the Vietnamese to talk about sex probably derives from Confucian influence on Vietnamese culture for many centuries. This reserved attitude about the exposure of the human body or direct reference to any part of the body hidden under clothes is deeply ingrained in the Vietnamese people and should be considered AN EXTREMELY DELICATE TOPIC.

American teachers would be well advised to consult with the parents of Vietnamese children before exposing them to any sexual material, explicit or implicit. Do not show films or diagrams of human sexual anatomy or reproduction systems to Vietnamese students without first consulting with your administrator and with the parents of the children involved. In some cases, special sex education groups, to meet required educational codes, might be organized and taught in Vietnamese by a Vietnamese-speaking teacher, paraprofessional, or parent, with the boys and girls separated.

Sex education is an important educational function in most American schools today. It is necessary to remember, however, that Vietnamese students will need to be introduced to this totally new and potentially embarrassing subject in a most delicate, under-

standing manner and with prior consultation with parents.

2.17. P. T. A.

There was a national Parent-Teacher Association in Vietnam and there were P.T.A. chapters in various schools throughout the country. However, they were not as active as those in the United States. As the study programs, the administration of schools, the hiring of teachers, the use of textbooks and so on were the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, the concern of P.T.A. members in Vietnam was with activities such as the building or extension of school facilities, the expenses of school buses, dealing with school officials about the problems concerning their children's education, etc. School officials in Vietnam had a much freer hand and more authority in dealing with the students' parents as well as with the students themselves, than school officials in the U.S.

2.18. The Vietnamese Language: Its Concepts of Time and Color

Vietnamese, as spoken throughout Vietnam, is a tonal language which varies slightly from one region to another. There are three main dialects: the Northern dialect with six tones, the Southern dialect with five tones, and the dialect in the Central part of Vietnam with four tones. Without going into a detailed comparative study of English and Vietnamese, a few striking features of the Vietnamese language which may interfere with the way Vietnamese use English may be helpful.

The present writing system of Vietnamese is a modified Roman alphabet system devised by the European missionaries in collaboration with the Vietnamese more than two centuries ago. Its spelling system is closely related to the spoken form of Vietnamese. The origin of the Vietnamese language is still an hypothesis among linguists. Due to close geographical proximity and cultural influences, the Vietnamese language contains a high percentage of vocabulary items borrowed from Chinese, just as English has borrowed extensively from Latin and French.

The Concept of Time: The Vietnamese language is invariable in form. In other words, to express the notion of past versus present, or plural versus singular, Vietnamese does not use inflectional suffixes such as play in contrast to played, or book in contrast to books in English. Instead it uses particles to express the same notion. Being basically an agricultural society, time or exactitude in the matter of time is not considered as important in Vietnam as it is in the industralized, urbanized United States. As a reflection of its culture, the Vietnamese language has a set of particles which are used to express time-relationships, i.e., the co-occurrence of two or more events,

rather than an expression of definite time. This does not mean that the Vietnamese language is not capable of expressing definite time. But it does mean that this concept of time and the way of expressing it will influence the way the Vietnamese uses English when his knowledge of the latter language is still imperfect. In addition, the pronunciation of sounds in the final position of a word such as s (in consonant clusters), and final es, t, d, -b, are unfamiliar to the Vietnamese tongue and ear and as such they are often ignored by the Vietnamese in speaking English, e.g. you might hear a Vietnamese say something like: "I work har on my tes las nigh" = I worked hard on my test last night.

The Concept of Color: The color spectrum as used in Vietnam consists of six basic colors. To express other shades of color, Vietnamese use objects in nature to qualify one of the main basic colors. This color spectrum does not coincide with that expressed in English. For example, xanh as used in Vietnamese may mean either blue or green in English. The Vietnamese could specify whether he means blue or green by qualifying xanh with other objects when he says:

Xanh da troi (Literally: xanh skin sky) - blue

Xanh la cay (Literally: xanh leaf tree) - green

Yes-No and Tag Questions: These might be a source of misunderstanding between Vietnamese and English. The cultural feature will influence the Vietnamese in an English answer. Whether students agree or disagree with the speaker, responses will always start with the English word yes, a translation of the polite form da used in Vietnamese. So, in listening to the response of a Vietnamese, it is best to ignore the initial "Yes," and concentrate on the statement that follows the form yes in order to interpret the answer. The initial "yes" merely means that the student is listening--paying attention to the speaker--but this "yes" does not refer to the student's agreement or disagreement with the question asked.

Do you smoke?

AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER	Yes,	I am listening. (i.e. paying attention) I do (smoke).
NEGATIVE ANSWER	Yes,	I am listening. (i.e. paying attention) I do not smoke.

Don't you smoke?

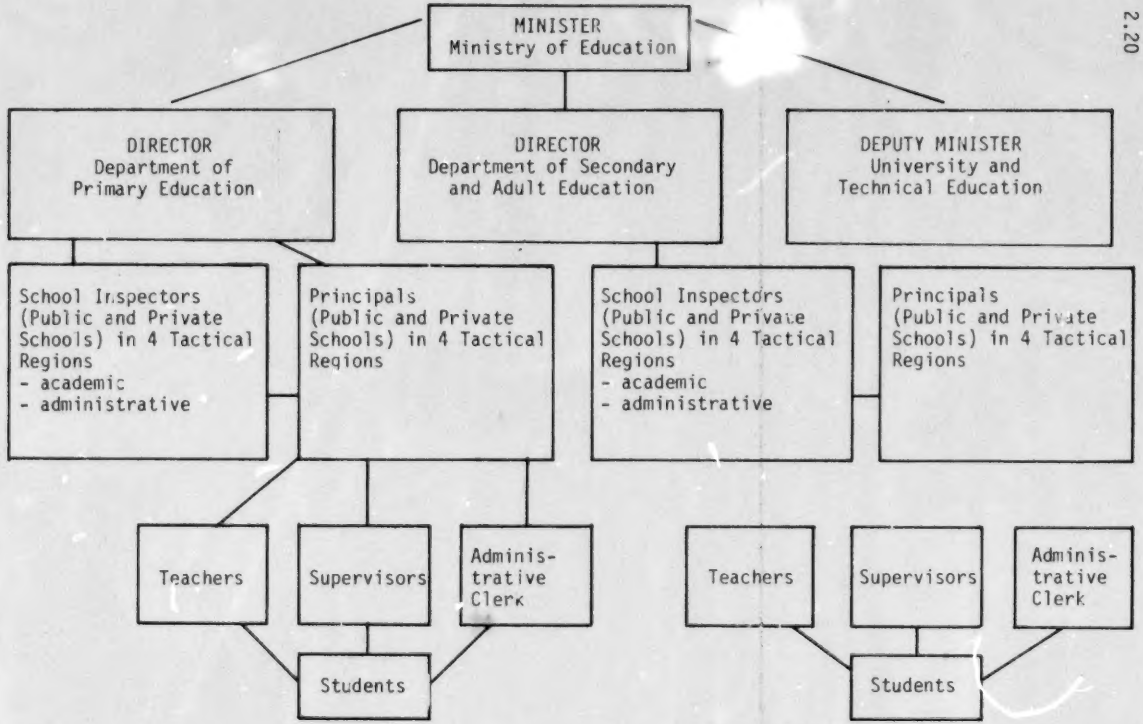
AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER	Yes,	I am listening. (i.e. paying attention) I do (smoke).
NEGATIVE ANSWER	Yes,	I am listening. (i.e. paying attention) I do not smoke.

You don't smoke, do you?

AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER	Yes,	I am listening. (i.e. paying attention) I do (smoke).
NEGATIVE ANSWER	Yes,	I am listening. (i.e. paying attention) I do not smoke.

LEVELS OF INSTRUCTION IN VIETNAM

PRIMARY EDUCATION: 5 YEARS	NURSERY	3 - 5 years old	
	KINDERGARTEN	5 - 6 " "	Private
	FIRST - FIFTH GRADE	6 - 10 " "	Public & Private
SECONDARY EDUCATION: 7 YEARS	FIRST CYCLE: 4 YEARS		
	SIXTH - NINTH GRADE	11 - 14 years old	
	SECOND CYCLE: 3 YEARS		
	TENTH - ELEVENTH GRADE	15 - 16 years old	3 Major Programs of studies:
	BACCALAUREATE PART I		- Humanities
	TWELFTH GRADE	17 - 18 years old	- Mathematics
	BACCALAUREATE PART II		- Sciences
		18 years and up	
UNIVERSITY & HIGHER EDUCATION:	DIFFERENT FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION		



Ministry of Education's responsibilities: Finance; Curriculum; School materials; School facilities; Examination; Training, Qualifying, and hiring teachers.

PART 3: Glossary of Terms Found on Vietnamese High School Diplomas and Certificates

The following terms have been provided to assist in the identification of items on the Vietnamese high school diploma/certificate. Regretfully, reproductions of the actual documents could not be included due to space limitations.

Ấn định:	to decide
Ban:	Section
Bằng:	Diploma
Bằng Trung Học Đệ Nhất Cấp:	First Cycle High School Diploma (after the fourth year of High school)
Bằng Tú Tài Phần Thú Nhất:	Baccalaureate Part I (after the sixth year of High School)
Bằng Tú Tài Phần Thú Hai:	Baccalaureate Part II (after the seventh year of High School)
Bình Dân Giáo Dục:	Adult Education
Bộ:	Ministry
Cấp:	to distribute
Chánh phú:	government
chứng chỉ:	certificate
Cộng Hòa:	Republic
cúoc chú:	post script
dậu:	to pass successfully the examination
Đệ Nhất Cấp:	First Cycle of High School
Đệ Nhi Cấp:	Second Cycle of High School
Giám Đốc:	Director
Giáo Dục:	Education
hạng:	rank
hạng thú:	pass (average C)
hạng bình thú:	pass (good, above average B)
hạng bình:	pass (very good, A)
hạng ưu:	pass (excellent, A+)
khoá:	session
Khoa Học Thực Nghiệm:	Experimental Sciences
Kỳ thi:	the Examination
một lần:	only once
năm:	year
nghị định:	order of the government

Nha Học Chánh:	Education Department
Nhận thực:	to certify
niên học:	Academic year
phê chuẩn:	to approve
quốc gia:	nation (national)
sắc lệnh:	decree of the government
sinh:	to be born
tháng:	month
thí sinh:	candidate
Tiểu Học:	grade (elementary) school
tỉnh:	province, city
Toán:	Mathematics
Tổng Giám Đốc:	Director General
Tổng Trưởng:	Minister
Triết Học:	Philosophy
Trung Học:	High School
trúng tuyển:	to pass successfully the examination

PART 4: References/Bibliography on Vietnam (Generally Available)

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Vietnamese Refugee Education Series

1. **English-Vietnamese Phrasebook with Useful Word List (for Vietnamese speakers)** $3.00

   A survival phrasebook and mini-dictionary designed to meet the immediate language needs of refugees upon their resettlement.

   Two accompanying cassette tapes $13.00

2. **Vietnamese-English Phrasebook and Useful Word List (for English speakers)** $2.00

   Simplified Vietnamese for Americans with pseudo-phonetic transcription.

   One accompanying cassette tape $6.00

3. **A Handbook for Teachers of Vietnamese Students: Hints for Dealing with Cultural Differences in Schools.** $1.00

   Suggestions for teachers to help reduce possible culture shock for Vietnamese students.

4. **A Selected Annotated Bibliography for Teaching English to Speakers of Vietnamese.** $1.50

   Information on classroom and resource materials from pre-reading through adult.

5. **A Personnel Resources Directory for the Education of Vietnamese Refugees.** $1.00

   Information on available Vietnamese and American educators who have by background, experience, or training, special expertise in teaching content subjects in Vietnamese or English as a second language.

6. **A Colloquium on the Vietnamese Language.** $6.50

   Presented July 15, 1975. Contains references to contrastive features between Vietnamese and English including 45-minute presentation in phonology and syntax and a 45-minute question and answer period. Price includes accompanying handout.